

# Dona Nobis Pacem

A Composition for Peace

By: Benjamin Slattery

## Humanities and Arts Course Sequence:

	Course Number	Course Title	Term
MU	2723	MUSIC COMPOSITION	B17
MU	2631	MEN'S GLEE CLUB	B17
MU	2631	MEN'S GLEE CLUB	D18
MU	3616	TOPICS IN INTERACTIVE PROGRMNG	C18
MU	3999	ISU: MUSIC COMPOSITION	C18
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## Abstract

In this London HUA Project Center experience, 19 WPI students and I worked together to explore and understand various aspects of the humanities and arts within specific historical contexts. My capstone project focused on composing music pleading for peace like Ralph Vaughan Williams' "Dona Nobis Pacem" did in Wartime/Swinging London. I used traditional Jewish, Roman Catholic, Greek Orthodox, and Islamic text to convey their peaceful values. I interwove the texts with polyphony that blended harmonically to represent the ideal of unity regardless of creed.

## Introduction

When I look around at the world today, I see so much death, pain, and violence. My purpose for composing this piece is to inspire peace, especially between religions and all who disagree on issues. Just as Ralph Vaughan Williams wrote his “Dona Nobis Pacem” to warn against World War II, I pray that hearing this composition can persuade at least one person to pursue kindness and peace, and to reject violence.

## Choosing the Text

In order for a choral song to flow properly and not feel awkward, the composer always has to start with the text. The text is all of the words that the choir sing. Starting with the text allows the composer to write the purest idea of the text, and everything else around it is added with a purpose. Otherwise they risk unintentionally rhythmically accenting syllables that aren't accented in the text. Instead, a composer usually seeks to maximize the emotional impact of the text. For this composition I chose selected texts drawn from each of the four prominent religious traditions (Catholicism, Greek Orthodox, Judaism, and Islam), by talking with people from each faith because they know their religion much better than I do.

For the Jewish text I chose Hine ma Tov at the suggestion of Ethan Hall.

*Hine ma tov u'manayim,  
shevet achim gam yachad.*

Which translates to:

*Behold, how good and how pleasant it is  
For brethren to dwell together in unity.*

This text praises the idea of peace between everyone. It is interesting because it approaches peace through the lens of people working together, and serving each other. Instead of viewing it passively, in choosing not to fight, this reframes the issue as an active paradigm. People need to actively choose to strive for peace or it will not manifest.

For the Roman Catholic text I chose the Agnus Dei, or Lamb of God.

*Agnus Dei, qui tollis peccata mundi, miserere nobis.*

*Agnus Dei, qui tollis peccata mundi, miserere nobis.*

*Agnus Dei, qui tollis peccata mundi, dona nobis pacem.*

Which translates to:

*Lamb of God, You take away the sins of the world, have mercy on us.*

*Lamb of God, You take away the sins of the world, have mercy on us.*

*Lamb of God, You take away the sins of the world, give us peace.*

This text, which is said at every Roman Catholic Mass, includes religious symbolism to remind all who hear it of Jesus Christ's ultimate sacrifice. Jesus is called the Lamb of God because His sacrifice on the cross is the New Testament fulfillment of Passover, where a pure lamb is sacrificed and its blood is spilled, which He celebrated the night before at the Last Supper, where He offered His body and blood as the sacrificial lamb. During the original Passover in Egypt, the blood was a sign for the angels to pass over the home and spare the lives of those inside. In a similar way, Jesus' blood is a sacrifice in order that God the Father would have mercy on all who repent and let them have eternal life. One of the key points is that mercy requires repentance, which requires one to follow the teachings of Jesus as interpreted by the Roman Catholic Church. "And to him who strikes you on the cheek, offer the other also. And from him who takes away your coat, do not withhold even your tunic." (Luke 6:29) This

teaching demonstrates the necessity of kindness and peace in Roman Catholic Doctrine and in following the path to eternal life. Through all of this religious symbolism and parallels between the Old and New Testament, the Agnus Dei text preaches a message of universal peace.

For the Greek Orthodox text I chose Ηαναφορα at the suggestion of Stephanie Gulezian.

*Eleon irinis thisian eneseos,*

*Ke meta tu pnevmatos su.*

Which translates to:

*Peace, a sacrifice of praise.*

This text is interesting because it highlights the sacrificial nature of peace. As resources are finite and limited, the only way peace is possible is if people sacrifice what they have for others, such that everyone has enough to go around. It is only when two people both choose not to sacrifice anything that they come into conflict. The connection between peace and sacrifice is summed up in the word compromise.

For the Islamic text I chose at the suggestion of Hammad Sadiq.

*Waanzalna ilayka alkitaba bilhaqqimusaddiqan lima bayna yadayhi mina  
alkitabiwamuhayminan AAalayhi fahkum baynahum bimaanzala Allahu  
wala tattabiAA ahwaahum AAammajaaka mina alhaqqi likullin jaAAalna  
minkumshirAAatan waminhajan walaw shaa AllahulajaAAalakum  
ommatan wahidatan walakin liyabluwakumfeema atakum fastabiqoo  
alkhayratiila Allahi marjiAAukum jameeAAan fayunabbi-okum  
bimakuntum feehi takhtalifoon.*

Which translates to:

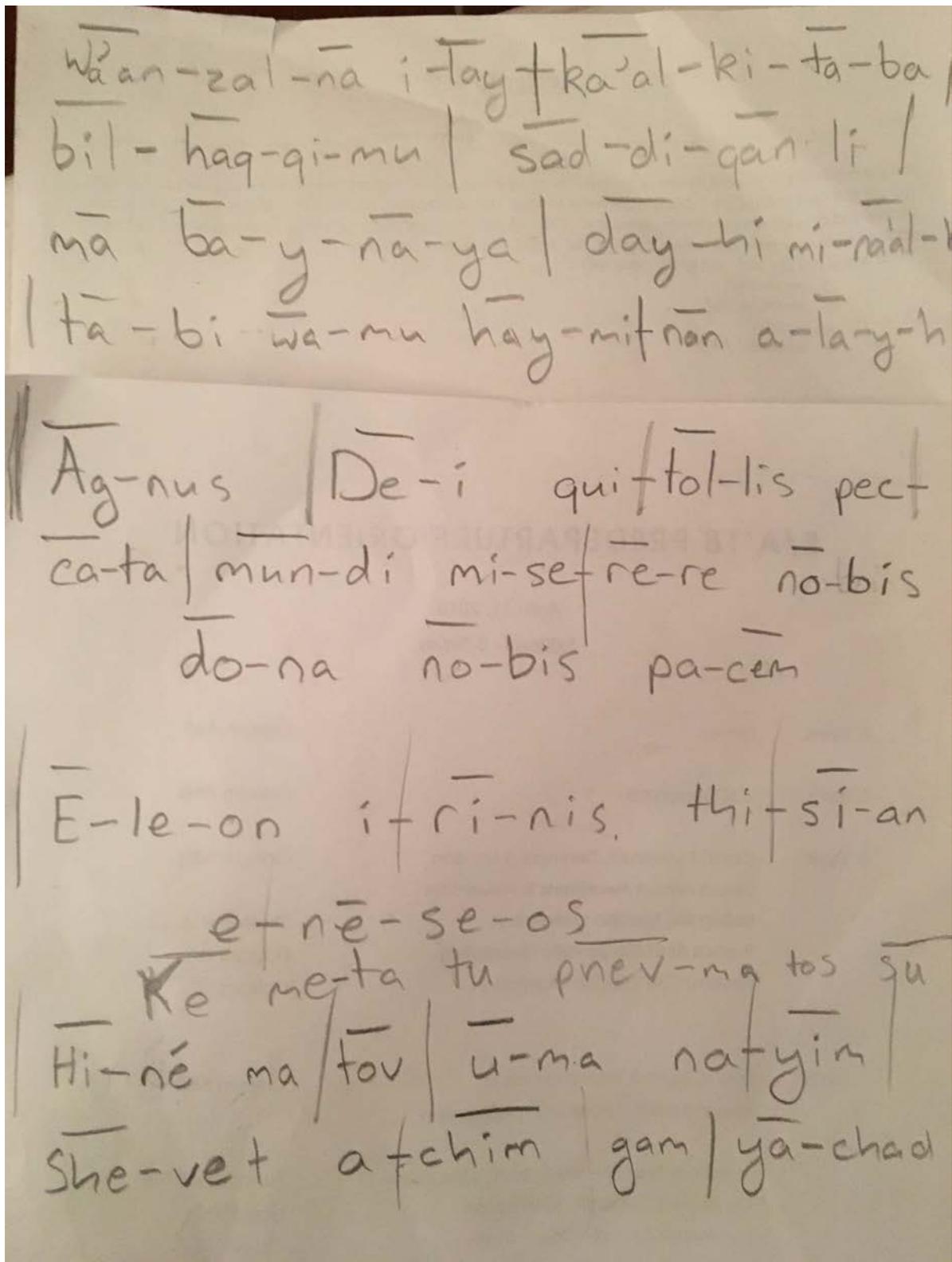
*And We have revealed to you, [O Muhammad], the Book in truth, confirming that which preceded it of the Scripture and as a criterion over it. So judge between them by what Allah has revealed and do not follow their inclinations away from what has come to you of the truth. To each of you We prescribed a law and a method. Had Allah willed, He would have made you one nation [united in religion], but [He intended] to test you in what He has given you; so race to [all that is] good. To Allah is your return all together, and He will [then] inform you concerning that over which you used to differ. (Surat al-Ma'ida, 48)*

This text emphasizes peace in spite of and even through diversity. It acknowledges the many differences people may have, especially in terms of religion. Even with those differences, this text points out that they are all different paths to the same end. This makes it even more important for people of different views to make peace, and to work together to reach that end.

## Choosing Rhythms Based on the Metric Structure of the Text

Now that I had chosen the texts, I wrote down each selection into groupings of syllables because a note is the atomic unit of music, and then I marked the accented syllables by putting a line above them. I used the placement of the accents to group the syllables into measures containing between one and three syllables each. I allocated for each text the same number of measures. I made sure that whenever one line had many syllables on the same measure, the other lines had few syllables. I distributed syllables this way because one of the principles of effective polyphony is that when one of the melodic lines is “active”, the others should be “passive” so that they don't draw the listener's attention away from the active text. Here I use “active” in the sense of having short notes and interesting leaps that draw in the listener's

attention. I use “passive” in the sense of having long notes with smaller jumps that blend into the background to create space for the center attention to draw the listener's ear. Through this method, I transformed the text into a series of rhythmic motifs.



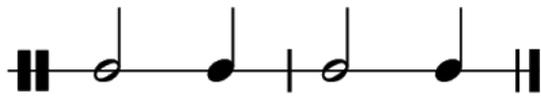
(Fig. 1, An example of a metric analysis of the text)

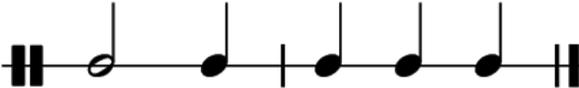
Islamic Rhythmic Motif 

Islamic Rhythmic Motif 

Jewish Rhythmic Motif 

Jewish Rhythmic Motif 

Greek Orthodox Rhythmic Motif 

Roman Catholic Rhythmic Motif 

*(Fig. 7-12, The rhythmic motifs that occur frequently inherent in the accents and meter of the text. Having similar melodic motion between each instance of these adds consistency and continuity to the melody.)*

# Dona Nobis Pacem Rhythms

Benjamin Slattery

The musical score is set in 3/4 time and consists of three systems of staves. Each system contains four staves, each with a different text tradition. The lyrics are written below the notes.

**System 1:**

- Islamic Text:** Wa'an - zal - na i - lay - ka'al - ki - ta - ba bil - haq - qi mu - sad - di - qan li -
- Greek Orthodox Text:** E - - le - on i - ri - - nis thi -
- Jewish Text:** Hi - - nei ma - toy u - ma na -
- Roman Catholic Text:** Ag - - nus De - i qui tol - - lis pec -

**System 2:**

- Islamic Text:** - ma ba - y - na ya - day - hi mi - na'al - ki - ta - bi wa - mu - hay - mi - nan a - la - y - hi fah -
- Greek Orthodox Text:** - si - - an e - ne - - se - os
- Jewish Text:** - yim she - vet a - chim gam ya - chad
- Roman Catholic Text:** - ca - - ta mun - - - di mi - se -

**System 3:**

- Islamic Text:** - kum bay - na - hum bi - ma'an - za - la'Al - la - hu wa - la tat - ta - bi ah - wa - a - hum am -
- Greek Orthodox Text:** Ke me - ta tu -
- Jewish Text:** Hi - nei ma - toy u - ma na -
- Roman Catholic Text:** - re - - re no - - - bis Ag - - nus

**System 4:**

- Islamic Text:** - ma ja - a - ka mi - na al - haq - qi li - kul - lin ja - al - na min - kum shir - a - tan wa -
- Greek Orthodox Text:** pnev - - ma tos su -
- Jewish Text:** - yim she - vet a - chim gam ya - chad
- Roman Catholic Text:** De - i qui tol - - - lis pec - ca - - ta

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Dona Nobis Pacem Rhythms

17

- min - ha - jan wa - la - w sha - a Al - la - hu la - ja - a - la - kum om - ma - tan  
 E - - le - on i - ri - - - nis thi -  
 Hi - nei ma - tov u - ma na -  
 mun - - - di mi - se - re - - - re

21

wa - hi - da - tan wa - la - kin li - ya - ba - lu - wa - kum fee ma a - ta - kum  
 - si - - - - an e - ne - - - se - - -  
 - yim she - vet a - chim gam ya - chad  
 no - - - - bis Ag - - nus De - i qui

25

fas - ta - bi - qoo al - khay - ra - ti i - la'Al - la - hi mar - ji - u - kum ja -  
 - os Ke me - ta  
 Hi - - - nei ma - tov  
 tol - - - lis pec - ca - - ta mun - - - -

29

- mee - an fa - yu - nab - bi o - kum bi - ma kun - tum fee - hi takh - ta - li - foon  
 tu pnev - ma tos su  
 u - ma na - yim she - vet a - chim gam ya - chad  
 - di do - na no - bis pa - - - cem

*(Fig. 13-14, The rhythms of the entirety of final movement, Movement V.)*

## Choosing the Harmony For Each Text

For the Jewish text I chose to use the Ahavah Rabbah mode<sup>1</sup>, named after the Jewish prayer of the same name that means “great love” (Cohon). In addition to a meaning that is quite fitting for the purposes of the composition, this mode fits well in terms of the final polyphonic<sup>2</sup> movement. If this mode is transposed<sup>3</sup> onto scale degree<sup>4</sup> 3 of the Major/Ionian mode, the modes are nearly identical. Therefore, if the melody often returns to scale degree 1 in its own movement, scale degree 1 of the Ahavah Rabbah mode fits perfectly as the third of the chord ending the final movement. The only difference between the modes being that scale degree 3 in the Ahavah Rabbah mode is raised a half step, and the corresponding scale degree 5 of the Major mode is not. This raised note is advantageous because in Bach-style music theory, a note can be tonicized<sup>5</sup> by raising the note one step lower than it by a half step, which makes the note temporarily sound like the key of the note being tonicized. This raised note means that the one chord of the Ahavah Rabbah mode can be used to tonicize scale degree 6 of the relative Major mode.

## Ahavah Rabbah



*(Fig. 2, the D Ahavah Rabbah mode)*

For the Roman Catholic text I chose to use the Major/Ionian mode so that the final movement can associate the idea of achieving peace with the happiness that Western music associates with the Major mode. I will use the parallel Minor/Aeolian mode when the text first appears in its own movement to associate the absence of peace with the sadness that Western music associates with the Minor mode.



*(Fig. 3, the C Major/Ionian mode)*

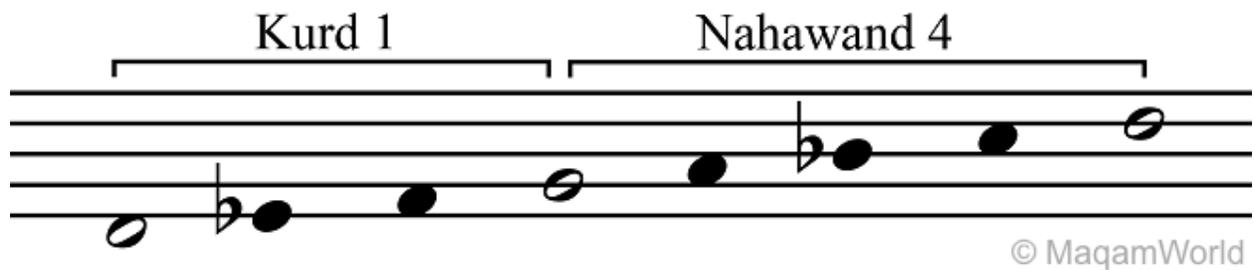
For the Greek Orthodox text I chose to use the Lydian mode of the Octechoes (Tillyard), which is the same as the modern Ionian mode. When transposed up a fifth, the key is identical except that scale degree 4 is raised by a half step. Just as with the Jewish text, this raised note can be used to tonicize scale degree 5 of the relative Major mode. While this would have been

ideal, I decided to instead keep scale degree 1 the same between the Catholic and Orthodox text, as it made the harmony of the final movement more cohesive. This means that the Greek Orthodox melody often returned to scale degree 5 instead of scale degree 1.



*(Fig. 4, the E Major/Ionian/Greek Lydian mode)*

For the Islamic text I chose to use the Maqam Kurd mode (identical to modern Phrygian mode) (Farraj) because if this mode is transposed onto scale degree 7 of the Major/Ionian mode, they are nearly identical. The only difference being that scale degree 5 of the Maqam Kurd mode is a semitone higher than the corresponding scale degree 4 of the Major mode.



*(Fig. 5, the D Phrygian/Maqam Kurd mode)*



(Fig. 6, From left to right shows the harmonic relationships between A Minor/Aeolian, C Major/Ionian, E Ahavah Rabbah, G Ionian/Greek Lydian, and B Phrygian/Maqam Kurd respectively)

Each of the note clusters in figure 6 represent one of the modes that I use in the song. It is important to note, however, that in the final movement (Movement V) I give liberal permission to each line to use notes outside of their mode and borrow from other modes. While this was not my original intention and I feel like this weakens the message, it was necessary in order to provide the opportunity for the overall harmony to be cohesive and convey the message of peace and unity. If the final movement fails to convey that message, then the entire musical piece has failed.

### Incorporating Harmony into the Rhythmic Structure

The image displays four staves of musical notation for the phrase "do - na no - bis pa - - - - - cem". Each staff begins with a treble clef and a key signature of one flat (B-flat). The lyrics are written below the notes. The first staff shows a melody with a half note for "pa" and a dotted half note for "cem". The second staff introduces a reharmonization, featuring a chromatic descending line in the "pa" measure and a different cadence for "cem". The third staff shows another variation of the melody. The fourth staff shows a further reharmonization, starting with a half note for "do" and a dotted half note for "cem".

do - na no - bis pa - - - - - cem

do - na no - bis pa - - - - - cem

do - na no - bis pa - - - - - cem

do - na no - bis pa - - - - - cem

*(Fig. 15, An example of reharmonizing the Roman Catholic melody, the final cadence of Movement II)*

**rall.**.....



o - kum bi - ma    kun - tum fee - hi    takh - ta - li - foon



o - kum bi - ma    kun - tum fee - hi    takh - ta - li - foon



o - kum bi - ma    kun - tum fee - hi    takh - ta - li - foon



o - kum bi - ma    kun - tum fee - hi    takh - ta - li - foon

*(Fig. 16, An example of reharmonizing the Islamic melody, the final cadence of Movement IV)*

29

The image shows a musical score for the final cadence of Movement V. It consists of four staves, each representing a different vocal part. The lyrics are in Latin and are written below the notes. The first staff has the lyrics: - mee - an fa - yu - nab - bi - o - kum bi - ma kun - tum fee - hi takh - ta - li - foon. The second staff has: u - ma na - yim she - vet a - chim gam ya - chad. The third staff has: tu pnev - ma tos su. The fourth staff has: - di do - na no - bis pa - - - cem. The music is written in a single system with four staves, and the lyrics are aligned with the notes.

- mee - an fa - yu - nab - bi - o - kum bi - ma kun - tum fee - hi takh - ta - li - foon

u - ma na - yim she - vet a - chim gam ya - chad

tu pnev - ma tos su

- di do - na no - bis pa - - - cem

(Fig. 17, An example of the polyphony of the four melodies, the final cadence of Movement V)

# Dona Nobis Pacem (Give Us Peace)

Benjamin Slattery

**Grandioso** ♩ = 72

SOPRANO  
Wa'an - zal - na i - lay - ka'al - ki - ta - ba bil - haq - qi mu - sad - di - qan li -

ALTO  
Hi - - - nei ma - tov u - ma na -

TENOR  
E - - le - on i - ri - - - nis thi -

BASS  
Ag - - nus De - i qui tol - - - lis pec -

5

- ma ba - y - na ya - day - hi mi - na'al - ki - ta - bi wa - mu - hay - mi - nan a - la - y - hi fah -

- yim she - vet a - chim gam ya - chad

- si - - - an e - ne - - - se - os

- ca - - ta mun - - - di mi - se -

Dona Nobis Pacem (Give Us Peace)

13

9

- kum bay - na - hum bi - ma'an - za - la'Al - la - hu wa - la tat - ta - bi ah - wa - a - hum am -  
Hi - nei ma - tov u - ma na -  
Ke me - ta tu  
- re - - re no - - - - bis Ag - - nus

Detailed description: This block contains the musical notation for measures 9 through 12. It features four staves: a vocal line (treble clef), a piano line (treble clef), a vocal line (treble clef), and a bass line (bass clef). The lyrics are written below the staves. Measure 9 starts with a treble clef and a key signature of one sharp (F#). The music is in a 4/4 time signature. The lyrics are: "- kum bay - na - hum bi - ma'an - za - la'Al - la - hu wa - la tat - ta - bi ah - wa - a - hum am -". Measure 10: "Hi - nei ma - tov u - ma na -". Measure 11: "Ke me - ta tu". Measure 12: "- re - - re no - - - - bis Ag - - nus".

13

- ma ja - a - ka mi - na al - haq - qi li - kul - lin ja - al - na min - kum shir - a - tan wa -  
- yim she - vet a - chim gam ya - - -  
pnev - - ma tos su  
De - i qui tol - - - - lis pec - ca - - ta

Detailed description: This block contains the musical notation for measures 13 through 16. It features four staves: a vocal line (treble clef), a piano line (treble clef), a vocal line (treble clef), and a bass line (bass clef). The lyrics are written below the staves. Measure 13 starts with a treble clef and a key signature of one sharp (F#). The music is in a 4/4 time signature. The lyrics are: "- ma ja - a - ka mi - na al - haq - qi li - kul - lin ja - al - na min - kum shir - a - tan wa -". Measure 14: "- yim she - vet a - chim gam ya - - -". Measure 15: "pnev - - ma tos su". Measure 16: "De - i qui tol - - - - lis pec - ca - - ta". The dynamic marking *f* (forte) is present above the vocal lines in measures 13, 14, 15, and 16.

14

Dona Nobis Pacem (Give Us Peace)

17

The musical score for measures 17-20 consists of four staves. The first staff is a vocal line in G major, starting with a treble clef and a key signature of one sharp (F#). The lyrics are: - min - ha - jan wa - la - w sha - a Al - la - hu la - ja - a - la - kum om - ma - tan. The second staff is a vocal line in G major, starting with a treble clef and a key signature of one sharp. The lyrics are: - chad Hi - nei ma - tov u - ma na -. The third staff is a vocal line in G major, starting with a treble clef and a key signature of one sharp. The lyrics are: E - - le - on i - ri - - - nis thi -. The fourth staff is a bass line in G major, starting with a bass clef and a key signature of one sharp. The lyrics are: mun - - - di - - - mi - se - re - - - re.

- min - ha - jan wa - la - w sha - a Al - la - hu la - ja - a - la - kum om - ma - tan

- chad Hi - nei ma - tov u - ma na -

E - - le - on i - ri - - - nis thi -

mun - - - di - - - mi - se - re - - - re

21

The musical score for measures 21-24 consists of four staves. The first staff is a vocal line in G major, starting with a treble clef and a key signature of one sharp. The lyrics are: wa - hi - da - tan wa - la - kin li - ya - ba - lu - wa - kum fee ma a - ta - kum. The second staff is a vocal line in G major, starting with a treble clef and a key signature of one sharp. The lyrics are: - yim she - vet a - chim gam ya - - -. The third staff is a vocal line in G major, starting with a treble clef and a key signature of one sharp. The lyrics are: - si - - - an e - ne - - - se - - -. The fourth staff is a bass line in G major, starting with a bass clef and a key signature of one sharp. The lyrics are: no - - - bis Ag - - nus De - i qui.

wa - hi - da - tan wa - la - kin li - ya - ba - lu - wa - kum fee ma a - ta - kum

- yim she - vet a - chim gam ya - - -

- si - - - an e - ne - - - se - - -

no - - - bis Ag - - nus De - i qui

Dona Nobis Pacem (Give Us Peace)

15

25

fas - ta - bi - qoo al - khay - ra - ti i - la'Al - la - hi mar - ji - u - kum ja -  
- chad Hi - - - nei ma - tov  
- os \_\_\_\_\_ Ke me - ta  
tol - - - lis pec - ca - - ta mun - - - -

Detailed description: This block contains the musical notation for measures 25 through 28. It features four staves: a vocal line in treble clef, a piano accompaniment in treble clef, a piano accompaniment in bass clef, and a bass line in bass clef. The lyrics are written below the vocal line. Measure 25 starts with a treble clef and a key signature of one flat. The music is in a 4/4 time signature. The lyrics for measure 25 are 'fas - ta - bi - qoo al - khay - ra - ti i - la'Al - la - hi mar - ji - u - kum ja -'. Measure 26 continues with '- chad Hi - - - nei ma - tov'. Measure 27 has '- os \_\_\_\_\_ Ke me - ta'. Measure 28 ends with 'tol - - - lis pec - ca - - ta mun - - - -'. The piano accompaniment consists of simple chords and moving lines in both hands.

29

- mee - an fa - yu - nab - bi - o - kum bi - ma kun - tum fee - hi takh - ta - li - foon  
u - ma na - yim she - vet a - chim gam ya - chad  
tu \_\_\_\_\_ pnev - ma tos \_\_\_\_\_ su  
- di \_\_\_\_\_ do - na no - bis pa - - - cem

Detailed description: This block contains the musical notation for measures 29 through 32. It features four staves: a vocal line in treble clef, a piano accompaniment in treble clef, a piano accompaniment in bass clef, and a bass line in bass clef. The lyrics are written below the vocal line. Measure 29 starts with a treble clef and a key signature of one flat. The music is in a 4/4 time signature. The lyrics for measure 29 are '- mee - an fa - yu - nab - bi - o - kum bi - ma kun - tum fee - hi takh - ta - li - foon'. Measure 30 continues with 'u - ma na - yim she - vet a - chim gam ya - chad'. Measure 31 has 'tu \_\_\_\_\_ pnev - ma tos \_\_\_\_\_ su'. Measure 32 ends with '- di \_\_\_\_\_ do - na no - bis pa - - - cem'. The piano accompaniment consists of simple chords and moving lines in both hands.

(Fig 18, the entire final composition)

Figure 18 contains the final version of the composition in full. While I unfortunately was only able to include the final movement, I believe the piece retains the moral value I intended. Each melodic line of the text retains its own identity by not moving in parallel fifths or octaves, and yet the parts all still come together harmoniously. This successfully conveys a feeling of unity between the voices. The fact that the melodic lines had to borrow notes from other modes with mode mixture in order to create a cohesive harmony is symbolic of the sacrifice that needs to be made of serving one another in order to obtain peace. The syllabic distribution of the polyphonic structure is symbolic of the necessity of serving others in order to achieve peace, because each line needs to spend time the other lines the spotlight.

## Notes

1. A mode is a collection of pitches within the space of an octave (no pitches exceed twice the frequency of any other pitch) in which the sequence of intervals between pitches is unique.
2. Polyphony is music in which there are independent musical lines that also have unique rhythms. In the context of choral music, the lines sing different words of the text at the same time.
3. Transposition is when a note or collection of notes are all changed solely in pitch by the same number of semitones or cents.
4. Scale degree is the term used to name a note in a mode. Scale degree 1 is the home of the mode, and is integral to the mode enough that the mode is always named after its scale degree 1.
5. Tonicization is when a note is made to feel like scale degree 1 by changing the interval between the note and the note below it to be a minor second, in order to imitate the leading tone of the V chord of the Major mode.

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