

Five Poems

Anthony Ross OP

I: *Christ ran stumbling*

Christ ran stumbling down the street
on little twisted feet;
small blue hands over the place
where someone had bruised his face.
His starved, thin body shook with tears
and quick short gasps of fear.

Bitter the December day,
streets and sky an equal gray;
no brightness, but the neoned pub
where city men with Christmas grin
forgetfully went out and in.

When did we see you? folk will say,
at the last day.

II

How far is it to Bethlehem?
Never very far;
You can find it if you will,
Staying where you are.

Only turn your eyes within,
Leave the world apart;
And go down to the broken shed
That is your heart.

Inside lies the baby Christ
Holding out His arms;
Take Him up and hold Him close,
Our peace in earth's alarms.

III

To love, and more to love,
Is all the heart's desire;
So springs the white fire
In which I burn.

I wandered far, dear Lord,
Before at last I came,
Wild, weary and in shame
Before Thy Word.

Come quickly! Oh, consume
All that can hide Thy face,
And in Thy loving grace,
Lord, keep me still.

IV: Requiem: 1948

Look how they lie, stretched out among the stones
In that dead valley where no whisper stirs
Nor any sound, but the thin, restless scratch
Of a stray beetle wandering among their bones.
Cold, white and silent under the winter stars—
What have they known?
What have they ever known?

We have known the darkness and the dust,
The urgent thrust upon the skull,
The weight of flesh;
Bonds; and beyond, the whirl and wheel of space,
The insane dancing of unnumbered spheres
And the wild laughter of the nebulae—
Sloping of time to a cataclysmic burst,
And the great comfort of the shattered life.

O how that darkness beckoned, that deep quiet.
But we went on, half-crazed;
Not glorious with trumpets or with drums.
No armour ever shone
In our round-shouldered, spectacled brigade,
Which plodded on afraid, always afraid.
We knew one thing—it seemed we had always known—
We must ourselves be sown, before we reaped.

V: Judgement

Thesis, antithesis; evil against the good;
Good against evil, bringing again the good;
And above all the shadow of God's cross.

We are the children of a desperate age,
Setting our stubborn faces towards the darkness.
We have ringed our selfish hearts with hardness;
Our feet are on strange paths into unknown places.

Cold wind of God whip down upon our heads!
And drive sharp hailstones into our faces, till we stop
and turn, bend low in childlike fear.
Thunder and lightning, hail and galactic wind—
Oh! let God's love strike down one bitter day!
Till light, fear-sharpened, see Blood upon the earth,
And God, all-patient, waiting for Man's soul.