1997

Two Poems: The Advent Carol & The Madonna of Dohany Street

Brian Wallace

Follow this and additional works at: http://digitalcommons.augustana.edu/intersections

Augustana Digital Commons Citation

This Other is brought to you for free and open access by Augustana Digital Commons. It has been accepted for inclusion in Intersections by an authorized administrator of Augustana Digital Commons. For more information, please contact digitalcommons@augustana.edu.
THE ADVENT CAROL

Perhaps it would have been better
if they had killed the baby in the manger,
crushed his tiny head with a rock.

Perhaps it would have been better
if they had put a Luger to the back
of his Jewish head and pulled the trigger.

Perhaps it would have been better
if they had taken his black body out
and hanged him from a tree.

If they had ripped the messiah from the manger
and tossed her into a river
because she was a girl.

Perhaps it would have been better
if the Tutsi baby were sliced to pieces by machetes,
if the Japanese newborn were incinerated by atom bombs,

If the Chinese baby were crushed
under the rubble of buildings
demolished by Japanese bombs.

Perhaps it would have been better
if Mary had aborted.
Hope is such an endangered child
here in a world so impatient for crucifixions.

Perhaps we would do better
taking hope in our hands
and squeezing the life out of it.

Instead we adore the baby
whom we do not understand, cannot feed,
whom we kill.

THE MADONNA OF DOHANY STREET

It is a quiet Sunday afternoon
in Budapest
on Dohany Street.

I can hear the clank and clink
of lunch dishes being washed,
music is playing through open windows,
a cat sits at a window
intense
looking at a flock of pigeons
on the street below.

This lazy afternoon is full of peace
as I sit in front of the synagogue
in what used to be Budapest’s ghetto,
but my heart is troubled
as I think of the Holocaust image
I saw earlier in the day
at the museum.

The image is a common one
full of meaning and reverence
for believers, and others, too
The Madonna and Child
signifying God entering the world of the living
and our divine roots.

I have seen a hundred Madonnas
with a hundred children
hanging in museums
or painted on cathedral walls
but today I saw a different view
a photograph Madonna and Child
that has left my life
changed.

The setting is not Nazareth
but the Budapest ghetto.
The Christ child is a girl.
She has a face I recognize
looking as she does
just like a little girl I know
named Abbie.

But this Madonna and Child
is sadly different from all the others.
The child in the picture
is not smiling under the gaze
of a loving mother;
her mouth gapes open, dead,
from a sunken, shrunken face.
The Christ child lies, eyes open,
in her dead mother’s arms.

And there, in an instant,
I see it all,
together in time and place:
annunciation, nativity, adoration, crucifixion.

And what of resurrection?

Maybe it began
with the change
I felt in my soul
when I saw this picture.

May god have mercy on us all.

Brian Forry Wallace, the author of these poems, is professor of Political Science at Capital University.