



# CHEMO REFUSED

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David Middleton

*—dying mother to unborn child*

I only did what Christ himself would do:  
I gave up life to give your life to you.

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David Middleton is poetry editor of *Modern Age*.

## HEADMASTER LEAVING

The snowflakes on the oaks have stayed the same  
Through all the changing winters of the years  
As every boy's bright face has since I came  
To make pressed lips articulate with tears.

The scrums, the prep-times, first loves, chapel prayers,  
The Founders' Days, the war dead etched on brass,  
Tired prefects calling "Lights out!" from the stairs —  
These were the holy texts in memory's mass.

And though I bore the headship and its stress —  
Hirings, firings, urging Old Boys to give  
And give again, yet doing more with less,  
My life a death through which a school might live —

This classroom was my own, oak-paneled, small,  
Unfitted with those terminals and screens  
New colleagues use so loudly down the hall,  
Their blackboards not on walls but in machines.

And here each year a dwindling remnant read  
That first and greatest tale of rage and lust,  
Dreaming of Helen's breasts and Hector dead,  
Troy's battlements collapsed in burning dust.

Yet now at last I leave a room for good  
Where ghosts still whisper Greek attentively  
While twilight blooms through panes in Gothic wood  
And snow in oaks falls silent over me.